

Water for Elephants

Talk about kismet! You know, kismet? Fate? Destiny? Jon emails me to tell me the circus edition of Exit Zero is coming to town (so to speak), and it just so happens that Water for Elephants is opening in theaters. Okay, so Jon had to sort of “assign” me to go to see this Reese Witherspoon film—and it’s not like I dislike her, it’s just that very few of her films have really ever appealed to me. The new film is based on the best-selling book, a love story set in the 1930s on the site of a failing, traveling circus.

Robert Pattinson (best known for playing Edward in the Twilight series) plays Jacob, a young vet student whose aspirations are cut short by the tragic death of his parents and the loss of the family homestead and business during the Great Depression. By fate (kismet?) he finds himself hitching a train that turns out to be a traveling circus. It is there that he meets the ring leader, a man named August (Christopher Waltz) and his wife, Marlena (Witherspoon).

The circus has lost its starring act when a show horse on which Marlena performs needs to be put down after Jacob (who has become the vet for the circus) diagnosis it with a terminal and painful condition. Anger begins to fly between the husband and Jacob as sparks fly between Marlena and Jacob.

Okay, as I write I can see why critics could call this film a little sappy (or soapy), but that wasn’t my impression in the theater. Although Witherspoon and Pattinson play their roles well enough, it’s Waltz who stands out in this film. He plays the antagonist with great depth. Maybe there’s an (other) Oscar in his future, and while it may not be for this film he demonstrates that he still has the right stuff.

From the train cars to the big top itself, the sets are meticulously designed. The supporting cast is great, and the dialogue and story are well crafted. But realize that that this is a romantic drama, similar to another film that I really liked, this year’s *The Lincoln Lawyer* (which is after all a court drama).

Sure, this film may have ripped a page from *The Notebook* (2004). But ultimately this film puts up a bigger tent than your typical romance (I struggled for five minutes to come up with that pun—give me a break). So after the circus leaves Cape May, check out this movie. For a free weekend pass to the Cape May Film Festival, be the first to email capemayfilm@hotmail.com with the name of the film for which Christopher Waltz won his Oscar.